

STATEMENT OF COMMISSIONER
MICHAEL J. COPPS

August 6, 2003

RE: Policy for Licensing Domestic Satellite Earth Stations in the Bush Communities of Alaska, Report and Order

If you want to see what satellite service means to the rural communities of Alaska go to a town called Levelock. The earth stations in Levelock are the primary links with the outside world. Hundreds of miles from any major city, Levelock's transportation network is a few dirt roads and its economy is subsistence. All phone traffic outside the town, all Internet traffic to the school, and the critical telemedicine system at the health center depend on the satellite links. This is a community where unemployment is rampant and more than a quarter of the people live below the poverty level.

I support today's decision. But surely changing the Alaska Bush Policy is only one of the many initiatives we can be taking here. We have a pressing responsibility to make sure that our fellow citizens to the far north are not left behind. And that puts Alaska right in the epicenter of so many of the initiatives, such as universal service proceedings, pending before this Commission. We have a lot of work to do to address Alaska's communications challenges, some of which are unique to that state. We must always be mindful and vigilant that we do not unintentionally undermine the ability of rural Alaskans to connect with the outside world. The best laid plans designed for the urban parts of the lower 48 States do not always work out quite right for rural and remote areas.

Finally, let me say how pleased I was to learn of the Chairman's recent visit to Alaska. I look forward to hearing his comments about his visit and about today's item.